

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

TAGS: PFOR, MARR, ET

SUBJECT: BALTIMORE SUN ARTICLE ON KAGNEW

1. THE BALTIMORE SUN, IN FRONT- PAGE ARTICLE MONDAY ON KAGNEW, SAID U. S. APPEARS RELUCTANT TO GIVE UP LAST MILITARY OUTPOST IN AFRICA. ARTICLE DATED IN ASMARA WRITTEN BY STAFF CORRESPONDENT TOM HORTON, WHO SAID KAGNEW, AFTER MANY MONTHS OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT ITS FUTURE, " APPEARS TO HAVE WON REPRIEVE."

2. HORTON NOTED THAT ARMY, ON JUNE 30, OFFICIALLY WILL TURN STATION OVER TO NAVY, " WHICH WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE TOO, BUT CANNOT." NAVY OFFICIALS IN ASMARA, ACCORDING TO HORTON, " MAKE NO SECRET OF FACT THAT THEY WERE ORDERED BY DEFENSE DEPARTMENT TO TAKE OVER COSTLY -- AND IN OPINION OF SOME, PARTIALLY OBSOLETE -- COMMUNICATIONS CENTER."

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3. HORTON SAID NAVY OFFICIALS IN WASHINGTON DECLINED OFFICIAL COMMENT, BUT SAID IT GENERALLY ACKNOWLEDGED AT KAGNEW THAT ITS COMMUNICATIONS TASKS CAN BE PERFORMED AT DIEGO GARCIA. SUN CORRESPONDENT SAID NAVY SITUATION SEEMS TO REFLECT " CONTINUING CONFUSION AT HIGH GOVERNMENT LEVELS OVER WHAT TO DO ABOUT 70 MILLION DOLLAR STATION."

4. HORTON OBSERVED THERE ARE " SOME INDICATIONS" THAT SOME STATE DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS, WHO AT ONE TIME FAVORED CLOSING KAGNEW, " ARE HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT DISPENSING COMPLETELY WITH OUR ONLY STRATEGIC FOOTHOLD ON AFRICAN CONTINENT. BUT PRIME CONSIDERATION APPEARS TO BE POTENTIALLY DISRUPTIVE EFFECTS CLOSURE COULD HAVE ON ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT, U. S. MAIN PARTNER IN AFRICA, AND RECIPIENT OF NEARLY HALF A BILLION DOLLARS IN ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE SINCE 1953."

5. HORTON PROVIDED CONSIDERABLE DESCRIPTIVE INFO ON KAGNEW, INCLUDING ITS FUNCTION, HE SAID, AS " CENTER FOR DEEP SPACE RESEARCH AND MONITORING OF RUSSIAN SATELLITES." HE POINTED OUT ARMY SECURITY AGENCY, " WHICH MONITORED COMMUNICATIONS OF NATIONS THROUGHOUT THE RED SEA AREA AND MUCH OF AFRICA," CLOSED ITS RADIO FACILITIES AT KAGNEW LAST YEAR. HE ATTRIBUTED THE DECISION TO INCREASED CONGRESSIONAL SCRUTINY OF ITS 12 MILLION DOLLAR ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET, IMPROVED USE OF SATELLITES AND SUBMARINES FOR COMMUNICATIONS MONITORING, AND " GROWING ENCHANTMENT AT HOME WITH U. S. MILITARY ACTIVITIES ABROAD."

6. NOTING THAT KAGNEW PUMPS NEARLY 5 MILLION DOLLARS ANNUALLY INTO ERITREAN ECONOMY, HORTON SAID " IT IS A LOSS THAT EMPEROR HAILE SELASSIE COULD ILL AFFORD."

7. NAVY PERSONNEL, ACCORDING TO HORTON, " RESIGNEDLY PUSHING AHEAD WITH TAKEOVER," ALTHOUGH MOST WASHINGTON OBSERVERS OF AFRICAN AFFAIRS " SAY THEY DO NOT EXPECT U. S. FORCES AT KAGNEW STATION TO BE AROUND WITHIN THREE YEARS, AT LEAST NOT IN SIGNIFICANT NUMBERS." LEASE ENDS IN 1978, AND HORTON QUOTED A DEPARTMENT OFFICER AS SAYING LIKELIHOOD OF RENEWAL " VERY, VERY DIM."

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